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## A VISIT TO A CHINESE KINDERGARTEN

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Wearily the kindergarten teacher plodded up the hill on Washington Street in Chinatown, San Francisco. About her flocked between thirty and forty children whom she had gathered up and was taking to the kindergarten in the basement of the Oriental Home. It is one o'clock—yes, past the hour—but all mission kindergartens have an afternoon instead of a morning session, the morning being too uncertain a time; for, with the Chinese, breakfast is a movable feast which rarely takes place before half-past nine, and may not come off until twelve or one o'clock.

We are acquainted with the teacher and greet her, then busy ourselves looking at the children in their queer costumes.

"You are late, are you not?" we ask.

"Oh, yes, I'm always late. I always have to wait for a few who cannot get ready on time, for I cannot afford to jeopardize our future by offending seriously in leaving some behind."

"Which are boys, and which girls? Tell us the distinguishing marks", we beg, in the meantime observing enough details to be sure of several pairs of trousers, nondescript in color, patched, rent, and re-rent, which have about them an unmistakable masculine air.

"Why, those are girls with the gayer cambric trousers with stripes of pink, blue, and green around the legs. The style of dressing the hair and feet, rather than the garments which cover the body, gives the marks of sex. Both boys and girls have their hair shaven part way back, and wear a bang about an inch in length all the way around until seven years of age. Both have queues, but oftener than not the little girl's queue is drawn to the side and tied or festooned elaborately over her ear, and decorated with ribbons, strings, and ornaments. Oil is used

plentifully in plastering every black hair down just where it is to stay. A long, heavy queue is a mark of beauty; and in the case of the girl, when Nature does not provide abundant tresses, the mother resorts to strands of cerise and green string, which she braids in with the hair until her daughter's queue assumes proper proportions. The process of hair-dressing is so elaborate that it takes place only now and then, say once in a week or ten days. There are other unfailing signs of femininity—earrings. The saying goes among the Chinese that a woman without earrings is like a pig without ears. This sort of feminine adornment is resorted to early, and also bracelets around the ankles."

We are now within the kindergarten quarters, a large room back of which is a yard visible through an open door. The swing out there has such attractions that a few cannot resist the temptation of making a dive for it, though they know perfectly well that the bell will ring in a moment or two. There are pegs on the wall for wraps and hats, but it is too warm for wraps, and few wear hats, the girls never unless they have arrived at the stage of assuming American attire. A band, ornamented more or less elaborately according to the wealth and position of the parents, is ornamental head-dress and hat at the same time. A few of the boys have American hats and caps to be disposed of, but it is a rare thing for a child to need an outside wrap. If cold, he or she puts on extra coats and wears them all the time.

The bell sounds, and obediently the children flock in, though loath to leave the swing which is a great treat to them, their only playground being the street or alley. They make a noise, but not the amount ordinary American children make under similar circumstances. The little chairs rattle, the American heels on the American shoes and the boat-shaped soles on the Chinese slippers clatter and shuffle until the assistant, a young girl from the Rescue Home, commands silence in Chinese. The words come out so explosively in a high nasal tone that it seems as if she were going to jump at every mother's child of the lot, but no one moves a muscle either in fear or surprise. They begin by singing "We Thank Thee, Our Father." What can this

mean to children whose religion is ancestor-worship? Then the assistant takes the younger children and shows them how to sew little designs marked on a card-board, while the teacher gives the older ones a lesson on drawing a buttercup. They sing about the pretty buttercup, talk about it, and make a picture of it with green and yellow chalk. Wah Foy is restless and insists on wiggling about and talking; it being quite proper to talk out loud in Chinese schools, his inherited predilections in that direction now crop out. He is told several times to be quiet, but he forgets. Finally the teacher covers his head with a green cloth. This produces silence, and now that Wah Foy is good she takes the cloth off. All the buttercups are drawn, and each picture is commented on in turn. As a reward of merit each one is to take his work home. Wah is ominously still. This bodes something. What is it? He has busied himself drawing the leaves on the papers of those on both sides of him. Dependent, shy Minnie, alias Ah Sau, could not get the touch and he furnished it; likewise, George, alias Sing Fat. The teacher pronounces these productions spurious, and decides to tear them up, whereupon Ah Sau and Sing Fat assume doleful expressions bordering on tears. Wah continues to wiggle, and, on the explanation of his behavior, we conclude that a bath would not be a bad thing for him.

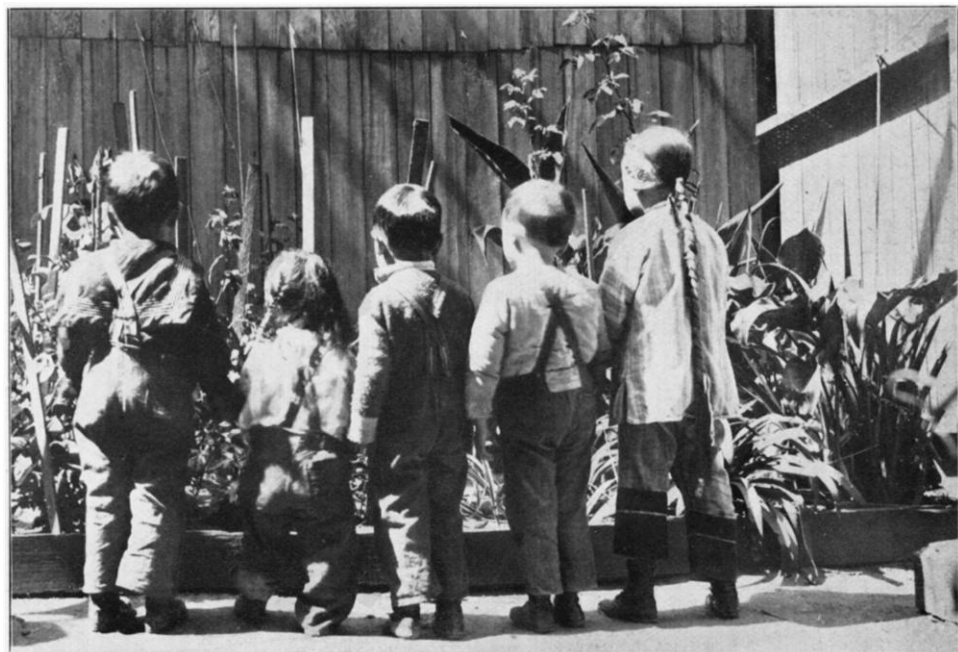
The assistant wishes three-year-old Sing Ling to put down his primer, which he holds with a death grip, and try sewing a card. Though this is his third day, he cannot be persuaded to part for an instant with this introduction to the learning of all ages. With his long Chinese trousers, once some bright color and now an indescribable merging of many, his Chinese slippers, and light-green coat over which he wears a bib with a big pocket squarely in front, he is a picturesque object.

"He go say his *abc*," quotes the teacher, explaining that when a child begins going to school, no matter what his age, he must have a book in which the alphabet occupies a prominent place.

"We put on no age limit. We have children of all sizes and ages here, our desire being to get them to come and to make them happy while they are with us. We say the alphabet every



MARCHING IN FROM RECESS



KINDERGARTNERS INSPECTING THE GARDEN

day. I understand modern pedagogical theories, but I've had experience, and try to join the two in loving embrace. We'll go through the alphabet now." The assistant explains what is wanted, and they begin, "*A-ah, b, c. . . .*" All goes pretty well until they come to *r*—the Waterloo of Chinese of all ages. They stumble over it, storming it with a faint *l*, and continue.

When the ordeal is over, the teacher comments: "We've said *abc*; and next we'll get in a circle and sing." It is a struggle to get all the children to toe the circle marked on the floor, and all the slant eyes on the teacher. Again and again the assistant repeats the command to those too immature to grasp what toeing the mark means. They decide upon singing "Pretty Dolly," and Mame, a Celestial barely four years old and not yet bleached out by the California sun, is asked to hold the "pretty dolly." She was the first to get her toes on the mark and keep them there, receiving from her teacher a beaming smile and the appreciative remark: "I like the way Mamie folds her hands and toes the mark." The little girl in blue Mother Hubbard with a self-satisfied smile on her face rocks the dirty rag doll (never by any wild flight of the imagination "pretty") without the slightest regard to its comfort, her mind being occupied with ways and means of procuring another toothsome compliment. She fastens her slant eyes on the teacher with a longing look of invitation. It comes: "I like the way that Mamie rocks the 'pretty dolly.'" Then someone else takes the dolly, while Mamie treads air as she goes to her place in the circle and again stiffly assumes the approved pose. The song drags. They march, have a language lesson on the orange, say some religious verses, then race out into the backyard for recess.

Playing horse and swinging are the favorite amusements. Round and round the yard the galloping horses run with danger to flying pigtailed and slippers. Back and forth go the swings. Intently some of the older children stand and gaze at the flowers which they love, but are not allowed to pick or handle. The yard is such a delight.

Wah Foy has rearranged his toilet, and, as it is well to have him busy, he is called upon to drum in the recruits. They

come. The horsy spirit has not had time to die within their demure little souls, and the boys do not behave any too well, that is, comparatively speaking. Usually they are so good. A few bump, jump out of line, struggle for the first place and gape about. Now they are soldiers, and "Here Come the Soldiers Marching." First there is a lesson on stringing beads and counting them, after which the children struggle through many explanations in getting ready to play "Flying Chickadees." To fly in proper numbers proves the tug of war. Then they "Hurrah for the Red, White, and Blue." (May these our native-born Mongolian citizens respond with equal vigor in the time of our country's need!) For "Clap, clap, clap" they muster much vim whenever the chorus comes in, but the words of the song spasmodically fade away and die, though the teacher's high soprano leads clearly and forcibly. The vigorous clapping has the effect of dwarfing vocal expression. All begin to act weary except Mamie, the model of deportment, who is still setting an excellent example. It is time to go home. All is quiet until Sit In's elbow hits a box containing beads, and away they go in every direction over the floor. Sit In hangs her head, and Wah Foy jumps at an opportunity to pick them up. He likes to be up and doing. His are the faded, rent, and patched trousers in which we first discovered unmistakable signs of Small Boy.

"Our final song—what shall it be?" queries the teacher. Half a dozen voices pipe up, "Jack Frost." Sweet inconsistency of childhood, the same in Chinatown as elsewhere! The day is phenomenally hot. Jack Frost, that merry little fellow, what can they know of him? California saw the one snowstorm which serves as a date in modern history on December 31, 1882. The suggestive description of his "nipping, pinching ways," however, gives the imagination delightful excursions into cool highways and byways. The teacher then asks the assistant to tell Ah Kum to bring two children who live in the same house with her to kindergarten the next day. Ah Kum replies: "They won't come. They're afraid of being put in jail." She promises that nothing of the sort shall happen, and as a token of her goodwill sends them some picture cards. The work is over for the



HIS FIRST DAY AWAY FROM MOTHER  
BRINGS TROUBLE



"HE GO SAY A, B, C"



MOY AND "MAMIE"



THE LAST RECRUIT TO THE  
KINDERGARTEN



NOT IN THE MOOD FOR POSING



day, and the teacher again starts out with her flock on her rounds through Chinatown.

This sketch was written a few days previous to the disaster in San Francisco. These children are now in the Chinese camp in the city and in Berkeley, where teachers are doing what they can to reorganize schools and kindergartens in cramped quarters and under trying conditions. Motley relief costumes have taken the place of the picturesque native costumes, and all is changed, until such a time when the Chinese shall once more be installed in new Chinatown.